

STATE DEPARTMENT CONTROVERSY BEGAN IN PARIS, CORRESPONDENCE DISCLOSED

WASHINGTON, Feb. 14.—The State Department Friday night issued the following statement:

"Secretary Robert Lansing has resigned, and his resignation has been accepted taking effect today."

Following is the correspondence between the President and Secretary Lansing:

"The White House, Washington, D. C., February, 1920.

"My Dear Mr. Secretary:

"Is it true, as I have been told, that during my illness you frequently have called the heads of the Executive Departments of the Government into conference? If it is, I feel it to be my duty to call your attention to consideration upon which I do not care to dwell until I learn from you yourself that this is the fact. Under our constitutional law and practice, as developed hitherto, no one but the President has the right to summon the heads of the Executive Departments into conference, and no one but the President and the Congress has the right to ask for their views nor for the views of any one of them on any public question."

"Serious Consequences" Noted.

"I take this matter up with you because in the development of every constitutional system, custom and precedent are of the most serious consequence, and I think we all will agree in desiring not to lead in any wrong direction. I therefore take the liberty of writing to you to ask you this question, and I am sure you will be glad to answer."

"I am happy to learn from your recent note to Mrs. Wilson that your health is returning. Cordially and sincerely yours,

"WOODROW WILSON."

The answer of Secretary Lansing follows:

"Washington, February 3, 1920.

"My Dear Mr. President:

"It is true that frequently during your illness I requested the heads of the Executive Departments of the Government to meet for informal conference.

"Shortly after you were taken ill in October, certain members of the Cabinet, of whom I was one, felt that, in view of the fact that we were denied communication with you, it was wise for us to confer informally together on inter-departmental matters and matters as to which action could not be postponed until your medical advisers permitted me to be seen and consulted, but I have to remind you, Mr. Secretary, that no action could be taken by the cabinet without me, and therefore there could have been no disadvantage in awaiting action with regard to matters concerning which action could not have been taken without me."

"This affair, Mr. Secretary, only deepens a feeling that was growing upon me."

"While we still were in Paris I felt and have felt increasingly ever since, that you accepted my guidance and direction on questions with regard to which I had to instruct you only with increasing reluctance, and since my return to Washington I have been struck by the number of matters in which you apparently have tried to forestall my judgment by formulating action and merely asking my approval when it was impossible for me to form an independent judgment because I had not had an opportunity to examine the circumstances with any degree of independence."

"Resignation is Requested.

"I feel, therefore, that I frankly must take advantage of your kind suggestion that, if I should prefer to have another conduct our foreign affairs, you are ready to relieve me of an embarrassment by placing your resignation in my hands, for I must say that it would relieve me of an embarrassment, Mr. Secretary, the embarrassment of feeling your reluctance and diversion of judgment, if you would give up your present office and afford me an opportunity to select some one whose mind would more willingly go with mine."

"I need not tell you with what reluctance I take advantage of your suggestion, nor that I do so with the kindest feeling. In matters of transcendent importance, such as this, the only wise course is a course of perfect candor, where personal feeling, as much as possible, is left out of the reckoning."

"Very sincerely yours,

"Woodrow Wilson."

In response to this note Secretary Lansing replied as follows:

"Washington, Feb. 13, 1920.

"My Dear Mr. President:

"I wish to thank you sincerely for your candid letter of the 11th, in which you state that my resignation would be acceptable to you, as it relieves me of the responsibility for action which I have been contemplating, and which I can now take without hesitation, as it meets your wishes.

"Accordingly I, as the ranking member, requested the members of the cabinet to assemble for such informal conference; and in view of the mutual benefit derived the practice was continued. I can assure you that it never entered my mind for a moment that I was acting unconstitutionally, nor contrary to your wishes and there certainly was no intention on my part to assume powers and exercise functions which under the constitution are confined exclusively to the president.

"During these troublous times, when numerous difficult and vexatious questions have arisen, and when, in the circumstances, I have been deprived of your guidance and direction, it has been my constant endeavor to carry out your policies as I understand them and to act in all matters as I believed you would wish me to act. If, however, you think that I have failed in my loyalty to you, and if you no longer have confidence in me and prefer to have another to conduct our foreign affairs, I am ready, of course, Mr.

"Mutual Benefits Derived."

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